

7. GROWTH OF PUBLIC OPINION IN THE EAST IN REGARD TO LINCOLN PRIOR TO NOVEMBER, 1860

(By Lucia A. Stevens.)

Lincoln's public life, up to the time of his election to the Presidency, may be roughly divided into four periods: First, the years of purely local influence, which resulted in his election to Congress in 1846; second, the term of congressional service and the succeeding years of preparation leading to the Lincoln-Douglas debates in 1858; third, the Lincoln-Douglas debates; and, fourth, the final epoch of activity and agitation which culminated in Lincoln's triumph in 1860.

For the first period practically nothing can be said concerning the "growth of public opinion in the east in regard to Lincoln," since, through those early years, Lincoln's reputation, although steadily increasing, was confined to his own State. He first became known to the east during the second period of his political life, the time of his service in Washington. We have many and varied opinions as to the extent and importance of his influence there. Arnold, in his "Life of Lincoln," states that "Lincoln took a more prominent part in debates than is usual for new members;" and the number of "remarks," "speeches," and so forth, recorded in his "complete works" would seem to justify the assertion.

The list is as follows:

December 22, 1847, "Resolution."

January 5, 1848, "Remarks "

January 12, 1848, "Speech."

January 19, 1848, "Report."

March 9, 1848, "Report."

March 9, 1848, "Report."

March 29, 1848, "Remarks."

May 11, 1848, "Remarks."

June 20, 1848, "Speech."

June 28, 1848, "Remarks."

July 27, 1848, "Speech "

January 16, 1849, "Bill to abolish slavery in the District of Columbia."

February 13, 1849, "Remarks in the United States House of Representatives."

Several of Lincoln's letters also throw valuable light upon his speech-making in Congress. A week after the House met he sent the following letter to his partner:¹

(December 13, 1847—Letter to William H. Herndon.)

WASHINGTON, December 13, 1847.

As you are all so anxious for me to distinguish myself, I have concluded to do so before long.

Yours truly,

A. LINCOLN.

¹ Nicolay & Hay. Lincoln's "Complete Works," vol. I, p. 96.

In this half-jesting statement Lincoln evidently referred to the "Spot Resolutions" which he introduced soon afterwards. The two letters given below refer, respectively, to his first speech which, as he says, was on a postoffice question, and to a second more important one, which was based upon the "Spot Resolutions."

"As to speech-making, by way of getting the hang of the House, I made a little speech two or three days ago on the postoffice question of no general interest. I find speaking here and elsewhere about the same thing. I was about as badly scared, and no worse, as I am when I speak in court. I expect to make one within a week or two, in which I hope to succeed well enough to wish you to see it."

January 8, 1848—Letter to William H. Herndon.¹

In a letter to Herndon, dated February 1, 1848, he says:²

"Before it reaches you, you will have seen and read my pamphlet speech, and perhaps been scared anew by it. After you get over your scare, read it over again, sentence by sentence, and tell me honestly what you think of it. I condensed all I could for fear of being cut off by the hour rule, and when I got through I had spoken but forty-five minutes.

Yours forever,

A. LINCOLN.³

The oblivion which overtook Lincoln's excellent speech, together with many other excellent speeches on the Mexican question, is ascribed by Nicolay and Hay to the Guadalupe Treaty which closed the debate, and blotted out all thought of the "causes and processes" which led to the momentuous result.³ The most popular of Lincoln's speeches delivered in Congress, was probably the one on "Military Coat Tails," to which Ben. Perley Poore, a newspaper correspondent in Washington at the time, refers thus:

"Mr. Lincoln received hearty congratulations at the close, many Democrats joining the Whigs in their complimentary comments. The speech was pronounced by older members of the House almost equal to the celebrated defense of General Harrison by Tom Corwin, in reply to an attack made on him by a Mr. Crary of Ohio. The two speeches are equally characterized by vigorous argument, mirth-provoking irony and original wit. One democrat, however, . . . didn't enthuse at all. The fact that Mr. Lincoln strode up and down the aisle while delivering his speech, gave rise to the following joke:

'Sawyer,' asked an eastern representative, 'how did you like the lanky Illinoisian's speech? Very able, wasn't it?'

'Well,' replied Sawyer, 'the speech was pretty good, but I hope he won't charge mileage on his travels while delivering it.'

Lincoln's most important and significant congressional work however, was doubtless his "Bill for the Prohibition of Slavery in the District of Columbia." In regard to this bill Joshua Giddings, one of the leading abolitionists in Congress, says in his diary:

This evening (January 11) our whole mess remained in the dining room after tea, and conversed upon the subject of Mr. Lincoln's bill to abolish slavery. It was approved by all. I believe it as good a bill as we could get at this time, and am willing to pay for slaves in order to save them from the Southern market, as I suppose every man in the district would sell his slaves, if he saw that slavery was to be abolished.

¹ Nicolay & Hay, Lincoln's "Complete Works." Vol. I, p. 99-100.

² Nicolay & Hay, Lincoln's "Complete Works." Vol. I, p. 110-111.

³ "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," p. 221.

⁴ Quoted in Nicolay & Hay "Abraham Lincoln—A History," V. I, p. 266.

The bill was defeated, but in regard to the interest aroused on the question of prohibition of slavery in the District, Lincoln in his Peoria speech, 1854, made the following modest statement: "I personally know that this has not been left undone because it was unthought of. It was frequently spoken of by members of Congress and by citizens of Washington six years ago; and I heard no one express a doubt that a system of gradual emancipation, with compensation to owners, would meet the approbation of a large majority of the white people of the district."¹ While, as we have seen, this bill was approved by the Abolitionists in Congress, it later, because of its necessary clause enforcing the return of fugitive slaves, called down upon its author a stinging attack from Wendell Phillips.

Side by side with the records of Lincoln's work as a legislator, we must put the testimony of many men who were in Washington during this period of his career. Robert C. Winthrop of Boston, Speaker of the House at that time, said, when writing, thirty-four years after: "I recall vividly the impressions I then formed, both of his ability and amiability. We were old Whigs together, and agreed entirely upon all questions of public interest. I could not always concur in the policy of the party which made him President, but I never lost my personal regard for him. For shrewdness and sagacity and keen, practical sense he had no superior in our day and generation."²

We also have from Mr. Winthrop's "Memoir" this further account of his relations with Mr. Lincoln: "For convenience he (Winthrop) kept lists of his guests, and the recurrence in them of names like Clay, Webster and Calhoun was a matter of course; but there is a single entry of a name destined in process of time to outshadow all the rest, that of the 'lone star of Illinois,' as he was sometimes called, he being then the only Whig in the delegation from that State. Mr. Winthrop was not one of those, if any there were, who discovered in Abraham Lincoln at that period the promise of exceptional fame; but he liked him personally, finding him shrewd and kindly, with an air of reserved force."³

Perhaps the most interesting testimony regarding Lincoln at this time is furnished by Ben Perley Poore, some of whose reminiscences have already been quoted. A number of boon companions were accustomed to meet in the postoffice and indulge in story-telling contests while waiting for the mail to be distributed. "After modestly standing at the door for several days," as Mr. Poore tells us, "Mr. Lincoln was 'reminded' of a story, and by New Year's he was recognized as the champion story-teller of the capital." Mr. Poore goes on to say: "It was refreshing to us correspondents, compelled as we were to listen to so much that was prosy and tedious, to hear this bright specimen of western genius tell his inimitable stories." Accordingly, as Mr. Poore testifies, "The election of Abraham Lincoln as President was very acceptable to the older Washington correspondents. They remembered him well in the 30th Congress, when he was the only Whig in the Illinois delegation, then but seven in number."

1. Nicolay & Hay, *Lincoln's Complete Works*, V. I, p. 190.

2. *The Lincoln Memorial Album*, 165.

3. *Memoir of Robert C. Winthrop*, p. 81.

The account which Mr. Poore gives of the friendship between Mr. Lincoln and Daniel Webster is also interesting and suggestive of the "westerner's" standing among prominent eastern men of the day.¹

"Daniel Webster, who was then in the Senate, used occasionally to have Mr. Lincoln at one of his pleasant Saturday breakfasts, where the western Congressman's humorous illustrations of the events of the day, sparkling with spontaneous and unpremeditated wit, would give great delight to the 'sated men of Boston' assembled around the festive board. At one time Mr. Lincoln had transacted some legal business for Mr. Webster connected with an embryo city laid out where Rock river empties into the Mississippi. * * * Mr. Lincoln had charged Mr. Webster for his legal services \$10, which the great expounder of the Constitution regarded as too small a fee, and he would frequently declare that he was still Mr. Lincoln's debtor.

"With these pleasant recollections of Mr. Lincoln, it was not strange that the older correspondents at Washington were glad to learn that he had been elected President. * * * They remembered their genial, story-telling friend, and felt confident that he would be somewhat communicative about public affairs, which Buchanan was not."

Strangely enough, in the light of future events, we also have the words of Alexander H. Stephens, as to Lincoln's standing among his law-making associates:² "Mr. Lincoln was careful as to his manners, awkward in his speech, but was possessed of a very strong, clear and vigorous mind. He always attracted the riveted attention of the House when he spoke; his manner of speech as well as thought was original."

James G. Blaine, however, evidently believed that Lincoln was little known during his stay in Washington. In regard to the mention of Lincoln for the Vice-Presidency in 1856, Blaine says in his "Thirty Years of Congress," "William L. Dayton of New Jersey, who had served with distinction in the Senate, was selected for the Vice-Presidency. His principal competitor in the only ballot which was taken was Abraham Lincoln of Illinois. This was the first time that Mr. Lincoln was conspicuously named outside of his own State. He had been a member of the Thirtieth Congress, 1847-49; but being a modest man he had so little forced himself into notice that when his name was proposed for Vice-President, inquiries as to who he was were heard from all parts of the convention."

Lastly, Mr. Lincoln himself, in a letter to his friend Joshua F. Speed, written February 20, 1849, gives his own modest opinion of his influence in Congress: "I am flattered to learn that Mr. Crittenden has any recollection of me which is not unfavorable; and for the manifestation of your kindness toward me I sincerely thank you. Still there is nothing about me to authorize me to think of a first-class office, and a second-class one would not compensate my being sneered at by others who want it for themselves. I believe that, so far as the Whigs in Congress are concerned, I could have the General Land Office almost by common consent; but then Sweet and Don

¹ "Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln," pp. 222-23.

² *Lincoln Memorial Album*, 241.

Morrison, and Browning and Cyrus Edwards all want it, and what is worse, while I think I could easily take it myself, I fear I shall have trouble to get it for any other man in Illinois. The reason is that Mr. McGaughey, an Indiana ex-member of Congress, is here after it, and being personally known, he will be hard to beat by anyone who is not.”¹

Mr. Lincoln finally decided to go after the position himself, but did so in a too dilatory and modest manner and the prize fell to Mr. Butterfield of Chicago. The Taylor administration later, by way of compensation, offered Lincoln the governorship of the new territory of Oregon, but this he refused.

After the close of his Congressional term, Mr. Lincoln made a speech-making tour of the New England States. Thurlow Weed, speaking of an occasion some time later, says in his autobiography: “I had supposed, until we now met, that I had never seen Mr. Lincoln, having forgotten that, in the fall of 1848, when he took the stump in New England he called upon me at Albany, and that we then went to see Mr. Fillmore, who was then the Whig candidate for Vice-President.”²

The “New York Tribune,” September 14, 1848, mentions Mr. Lincoln as addressing a great Whig meeting in Boston, September 12. The “Boston Atlas” refers to speeches made by him at Dorchester, September 16; at Chelsea, September 17; and by Lincoln and Seward at Boston, September 22, on which occasion, the report says: “Mr. Lincoln of Illinois, next came forward, and was received with great applause. He spoke about an hour and made a powerful and convincing speech, which was cheered to the echo.”³

“The most brilliant of Mr. Lincoln’s speeches in this campaign—according to Robert C. Winthrop Jr.’s recent memoir of the Hon. David Sears—was delivered at Worcester, September 13, 1848, when, after taking for his text Mr. Webster’s remark that the nomination of Martin Van Buren for the Presidency by a professed anti-slavery party could fitly be regarded only as a trick or a joke, Mr. Lincoln proceeded to declare that of the three parties then asking the confidence of the country, the new one had less of principle than any other, adding, amid shouts of laughter, that the recently constructed elastic Free-Soil platform reminded him of nothing so much as the pair of trousers offered for sale by a Yankee peddler, which were ‘large enough for any man and small enough for any boy.’”⁴

After his New England trip Mr. Lincoln returned home, there to build up a reputation, which was to pass the bounds of his own State, even before the famous “Debates.” The facts and references here presented seem to show that Lincoln was more widely and popularly known in the East than is commonly supposed; and that during his Congressional life he at least laid a sure and broad foundation for his subsequent success.

¹ Nicolay & Hay, *Lincoln’s Complete Works*, I. 133.

² *Autobiography*, I. 603.

³ Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln—A History*, I. 281.

⁴ Quoted in Nicolay and Hay, *Abraham Lincoln—A History*, I, p.

The years intervening before the third period of Lincoln's public life, the time of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, were years of preparation which fitted him for the crisis in which he was to play such a leading part. After some preliminary joint meetings, Lincoln and Douglas came together in 1858 in the great debate series. Lincoln, who had been called from his temporary retirement from political life by the re-opening of the slavery agitation, threw himself earnestly into the contest. It is safe to assert that, at that time, the East generally was not alive to the importance of the discussion. However, various contemporaries of Lincoln have recorded their impressions of him during this time, and he himself in some of his letters has furnished us clues as to how his candidacy for the United States Senatorship was regarded among eastern men. The following letters, one from Lincoln to Wilson, and the other from Greeley to Medill, show plainly the attitude of the great eastern editor:

"Springfield, June 1, 1858.¹

Charles L. Wilson, Esq.—

My dear Sir:—Yours of yesterday, with the enclosed newspaper slip is received. I have never said or thought more, as to the inclination of some of our Eastern Republican friends to favor Douglas—than I expressed in your hearing on the evening of the 21st of April, at the State library in this place. I have believed—I do believe now—that Greeley, for instance, would be rather pleased to see Douglas re-elected over me or any other Republican; and yet I do not believe it is so because of any secret arrangement with Douglas: it is because he thinks Douglas's superior position, reputation, experience, ability if you please, would more than compensate for his lack of a pure Republican position, and therefore his re-election do the general cause of our Republicanism more good than would the election of any of our better undistinguished pure Republicans. I do not know how you estimate Greeley, but I consider him incapable of corruption or falsehood. He denies that he directly is taking part in favor of Douglas, and I believe him. Still his feeling constantly manifests itself in his paper, which, being so extensively read in Illinois, is, and will continue to be a drag upon us. I have also thought that Governor Seward, too, feels about as Greeley does, but not being a newspaper editor, his feeling in this respect is not much manifested. I have no idea that he is, by conversation or by letter, urging Illinois Republicans to vote for Douglas."

² In Greeley's letter of July 24 to Joseph Medill, he says:

"My Friend: You have taken your own course,—don't try to throw the blame on others. You have repelled Douglas, who might have been conciliated and attached to our own side, whatever he may now find it necessary to say or do, and instead of helping us in other States, you have thrown a load upon us that may probably break us down. You knew what was the almost unanimous desire of the Republicans of other States; and you spurned and insulted them. Now go ahead and fight it through. You are in for it, and it does no good to make up wry faces. What I have said in the 'Tribune' since the fight was resolved on, has been in good faith, intended to help you through. If Lincoln would fight up to the work also, you might get through—if he apologizes, and retreats, he is lost, and all others go down with him. His first Springfield speech (at the convention) was in the right key; his Chicago speech was bad; and I fear the new Springfield speech is worse. If he dare not stand on broad Republican ground, he cannot stand at all. That, however, is his business, he is no wise responsible for what I say. I shall stand on the broad, anti-slavery ground which I have occupied for years. I cannot change it to help your fight; and I should only damage you if I did. You have

¹ Nicolay & Hay, *Lincoln's Complete Works*, I. 238.

² Nicolay & Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, a History*. Vol. 2, pp. 140-141.

got your Elephant—you would have him—now shoulder him! He is not so very heavy, after all. As I seem to displease you equally when I try to keep you out of trouble, and when, having rushed in in spite of me, I try to help you in the struggle you have unwisely provoked, I must keep neutral so far as may be hereafter."

In his "American Conflicts," however, Greeley, looking back upon the situation, speaks some what more favorably: "They held a sort of State Convention, therefore, and presented Abraham Lincoln as a Republican competitor for Mr. Douglas's seat; and he opened the canvass at once, in a terse, forcible and thoroughly 'radical' speech, wherein he enunciated the then startling, if not absolutely novel, doctrine that the Union cannot permanently endure half Slave and half Free. * * * This almost prophetic statement, from one born in Kentucky, and who had been known, prior to the appearance of the Dred Scott decision, as a rather conservative Whig, was put forth more than four months before Governor Seward, as if under a like premonition of coming events, said: * * *"

On July 27, 1858, another editor, Ray of Chicago, wrote to Lincoln concerning the wide influence of his speeches, as follows:

1 "You are like Byron, who woke up one morning and found himself famous. People wish to know about you. You have sprung at once from the position of a capital fellow and a leading lawyer in Illinois, to a national reputation."

In the same connection, also, David Davis, shortly after the election, sent these words to Lincoln: "You have made a noble canvass, which, if unavailing in the State, has earned you a national reputation and made you friends everywhere."

On the return of Douglas to Washington, after the senatorial contest, he said to Henry Wilson, in reply to the question as to what he thought of Mr. Lincoln: "He is an able and honest man, one of the noblest men of the nation. I have been in Congress sixteen years, and there is not a man in the Senate I would not rather encounter in debate."²

Despite the many favorable opinions concerning Lincoln, there was also much ignorance and prejudice. Edwin M. Stanton had held the Westerner in disdain since their joint connection with a law case which was tried in the United States Circuit Court in Cincinnati in 1857. Ben Perley Poore refers to Mr. Stanton as indulging in "tirades against Mr. Lincoln, saying on one occasion he 'had met him at the bar, and found him a low, cunning clown.'"³

In August, 1858, Theodore Parker wrote: "I look with great interest on the contest in your state, and read the speeches, the noble speeches, of Mr. Lincoln with enthusiasm." His sentiments, however, had evidently changed a few days later, when he wrote again as follows: "In the Ottawa meeting, to judge from the Tribune report, I thought Douglas had the best of it. He questioned Mr. Lincoln on the great matters of slavery, and put the most radical questions * * * before the people. Mr. Lincoln did not meet the issue. He made a technical evasion. * * * Daniel Webster stood on higher anti-slavery

1 Nicolay & Hay, *Abraham Lincoln, a History*. II, pp. 176-177.

2 Wilson, *Rise and Fall of the Slave Power*, II, 577.

3 *Reminiscences of Abraham Lincoln*, p. 223.

ground than Abraham Lincoln now. Greeley's conduct I think is base. * * * He has no talent for a leader. If the Republicans sacrifice their principle for success, then they will not be lifted up, but blown up. I trust Lincoln will conquer. It is admirable education for the masses—this fight!"

The administration party was opposed to both sides of the controversy. As Rhodes says, its organ "thought the debates a 'novel and vicious procedure,' the campaign disgraced by 'indecencies and disreputable vituperation.' There was little choice between Lincoln and Douglas. Douglas was a renegade, Lincoln 'a shallow empiric, an ignorant pretender or a political knave,' and the two 'a pair of depraved, blustering, mischievous, low-down demagogues'."

But little original material could be found regarding the attitude of Eastern newspapers toward Lincoln just previous to, and during the period of the debates. Rhodes makes the following statement:¹ "The only notice I found in Eastern newspapers of Lincoln's efforts was in a letter from Springfield to the New York Times of October 13th, where the mention was briefly 'Lincoln made a most unanswerable speech against the repeal of the Missouri Compromise'."

An examination of the *Liberator* of the year 1858, revealed several severe criticisms of Douglas for his utterances on slavery during the "Debates," but no estimates of Lincoln, either favorable or unfavorable. The literary men of the East, however, have furnished additional information concerning Lincoln's standing there during this period. In Arnold's "Life of Lincoln" is quoted a letter which Longfellow wrote in reply to a sketch of Lincoln's Debates, sent to him a short time before his death. The letter which is dated at Cambridge, February 22, 1881, is as follows:

I have read it (the sketch) with interest and pleasure, particularly that part of it which relates to Mr. Lincoln. I well remember the impression made upon me by his speeches in this famous political canvass of 1858, as reported in the papers at the time, and am glad to find it renewed and confirmed by your vivid sketches.²

Strangely enough, the "Life of Henry W. Longfellow," by Samuel Longfellow, contains only brief and slightly critical mention of Lincoln. A curious story is told by Edward Everett Hale.³

"One of Lowell's fellow professors told me this curious story, which will illustrate the narrowness of New England observation at that time. There appeared at Cambridge in the year 1859 a young gentleman named Robert Todd Lincoln, who has been already quoted, and is quite well known in this country and in England. This young man wished to enter Harvard College, and his father, one Abraham Lincoln, who has since been known in the larger world, had fortified him with a letter of introduction to Dr. Walker, the president of the college. This letter of introduction was given by one Stephen A. Douglas, who was a person also then quite well known in political life, and he presented the young man to Dr. Walker as being the son of his friend Abraham Lincoln, 'with whom I have lately been canvassing the State of Illinois.' When this letter, now so curious in

1. Rhodes' *History of the United States*, II 70; note 342, 343.

2. Arnold, *Life of Lincoln*, 142.

3. E. Hale, *James Russell Lowell and His Friends*, 201.

history, was read, Lowell said to my friend who tells me the story, 'I suppose I am the only man in this room who has ever heard of this Abraham Lincoln, but he is the person with whom Douglas has been traveling up and down in Illinois, canvassing the State in their new western fashion, as representatives of the two parties, each of them being the candidate for the vacant seat in the Senate.' What is more, my friend says it is probably true that at the moment when this letter was presented by young Robert Lincoln, none of the faculty at Harvard College, excepting Lowell, had ever heard of Abraham Lincoln. This story is a good one, as showing how far it was in those days possible for a circle of intelligent men to know little or nothing of what was happening in the world beyond the sound of their college bell.

NOTE—This anecdote arrested attention when it was first published, and I received more than one note explaining to me that it could not be true. All the same it is true. And I took care to verify the dates of the several steps of the story.

Another account, which emphasizes the importance of the debates, showing how they influenced public opinion in the East, and finally led to Lincoln's nomination, is given by Jesse W. Fell:

"In the fall of 1858, during the discussion between Senator Douglas and Mr. Lincoln, I had occasion to visit the middle and eastern states; and as the whole country was then agitated by the slavery question and that discussion cut a prominent figure in the agitation, I was frequently applied to for information in reference to Mr. Lincoln. I felt my State pride flattered by these inquiries, and still more to find the New York Tribune, and other papers, publishing copious extracts from these discussions, taken from the Chicago press. I did what little I could to satisfy so laudable a curiosity, not thinking, at first, that anything further would come of this discussion in reference to Mr. Lincoln, than his election to the Senate. At length, from the frequency of these inquiries and public notices of the Illinois contest an impression began to form that by judicious efforts he could be made the Republican candidate for the presidency in 1860. Very soon after my return home and after the senatorial contest had closed, one evening, as I passed on the south side of the public square of this city, I espied the tall form of Mr. Lincoln emerging from the court house door, Judge Davis' court then being in session. I stopped until he came across the street, when, after the usual salutations, I asked him to go with me into my brother's (K. N. Fell) law office, then kept over what is now the Home bank. There we sat down and in the calm twilight of the evening, had substantially the following conversation:

Fell—"Lincoln, I have been east as far as Boston and up into New Hampshire, traveling in all the New England states, save Maine, in New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Ohio, Michigan and Indiana, and everywhere I hear you talked about. Very frequently I have been asked: 'Who is this man Lincoln of your State now canvassing in opposition to Senator Douglas?' Being, as you know, an ardent Republican and your friend I usually told them we had in Illinois two giants instead of one; that Douglas was the little one, as they all

knew, but that you were the big one, which they didn't all know. But seriously, Lincoln, Judge Douglas being so widely known you are getting a national reputation through him as the result of the late discussion; your speeches, in whole or in part, on both sides, have been pretty extensively published in the east; you are there regarded by discriminating minds as quite a match for him in debate, and the truth is, I have a decided impression that if your popular history and efforts on the slavery question can be sufficiently brought before the people, you can be made a formidable if not a successful candidate for the presidency.'

Lincoln—Oh, Fell, what's the use of talking of me for the presidency, whilst we have such men as Seward, Chase and others, who are so much better known to the people, and whose names are so intimately associated with the principles of the Republican party. Everybody knows them; nobody, scarcely, outside of Illinois, knows me. Besides, is it not, as a matter of justice, due to such men, who have carried this movement forward to its present status, in spite of fearful opposition, personal abuse, and hard names? I really think so.

Fell—There is much truth in what you say. The men you allude to, occupying more prominent positions, have undoubtedly rendered a larger service in the Republican cause than you have; but the truth is, they have rendered too much service to be available candidates. Placing it on the ground of personal services, or merits, if you please, I concede at once the superiority of their claims. Personal services and merits, however, when incompatible with the public good, must be laid aside. Seward and Chase have both made long records on the slavery question, and have said some very radical things which, however just and true in themselves, and however much these men may challenge our admiration for their courage and devotion to unpopular truths, would seriously damage them in the contest, if nominated. * * * Your discussion with Judge Douglas has demonstrated your ability and your devotion to freedom; you have no embarrassing record; you have sprung from the humble walks of life, sharing in its toils and trials; and if we can only get these facts sufficiently before the people, depend upon it, there is some chance for you. And now, Mr. Lincoln, I come to the business part of this interview. My native state, Pennsylvania, will have a large number of votes to cast for somebody on the question we have been discussing. Pennsylvania don't like, over much, New York and her politicians. She has a candidate, Cameron, of her own, but he will not be acceptable to a larger part of her own people, much less abroad, and will be dropped. Through an eminent jurist and essayist of my native county in Pennsylvania, favorably known throughout the state, I want to get up a well considered, well written newspaper article telling the people who you are and what you have done, that it may be circulated, not only in that state, but elsewhere, and thus help in manufacturing sentiment in your favor.

Lincoln—Fell, I admit the force of much that you say, and admit that I am ambitious, and would like to be President. I am not insensible to the compliment you pay me, and the interest you manifest in

the matter; but there is no such good luck in store for me as the presidency of these United States; besides there is nothing in my early history that would interest you or anybody else; and, as Judge Davis says, "It won't pay." Good night.

And thus ended, for the time being, my pet scheme of helping to make Lincoln President. I notified him, however, as his giant form, wrapped in a dilapidated shawl, disappeared in the darkness, that this was not the last of it; that the facts must come."

Such is the original material gathered concerning the standing of Lincoln in the East during the period of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and up to the time of the Cooper Institute address. From so many conflicting opinions it is difficult to sift the truth. It will be noticed, however, that it is those statements written with the backward glance, that speak most favorably of Lincoln's influence and popularity. This would lead us to infer that some of the chroniclers were not as true and accurate prophets as they would have us believe, and that Lincoln, while of interest to politicians as a piece on the board whose exact value was not known, was not recognized and appreciated to any marked degree by the great mass of eastern people.

The last period treated in the discussion of the "Growth of Public Opinion in the East in Regard to Lincoln" extends from the time of the debates to the election in 1860. It is not felt that this last, broadest field has been covered as thoroughly as the preceding ones, but the main lines of the development of public sentiment toward the "Great Westerner" will be shown. To record all of the notices of Lincoln during this period when, for the first time, he was brought fully before the public gaze, would require a small volume. As in the development of the previous epochs, the material has been drawn from statements of Lincoln himself, from opinions of contemporary statesmen and writers, and from newspapers of the time.

In 1859 Lincoln wrote to Schuyler Colfax—afterwards Vice-President of the United States—giving general advice on the political situation, and Colfax replied: "How this mass of mind shall be consolidated into a victorious phalanx in 1860 is the great problem, I think, of our eventful times. And he who could accomplish it is worthier of fame than Napoleon or Victor Emmanuel. * * * In this work, to achieve success, and to achieve it without sacrifice of essential principle, you can do far more than one like myself, so much younger. Your counsel carries great weight with it; for, to be plain, there is no political letter that falls from your pen which is not copied throughout the Union."

Another incident soon occurred which was to establish Lincoln's leadership still more widely and thoroughly. In January, 1860, he received the following invitation: "The Young Men's Central Republican Union of this city [New York] very earnestly desire that you should deliver what I may term a political lecture during the ensuing month. The peculiarities of the case are these: a series of lectures has been determined upon. The first was delivered by Mr. Blair of

1 Nicolay & Hay, *Abraham Lincoln—A History*, II. 180-82.

St. Louis, a short time ago; the second will be in a few days by Mr. Cassius M. Clay, and the third we would prefer to have from you rather than any other person.”¹

Lincoln was pleased to accept this flattering invitation, and prepared his speech, since known as “The Cooper Union Address,” most carefully. The following accounts of the speech and its reception are taken from “The New York Times.”²

“The announcement that Hon. Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois, would deliver an address in Cooper Institute last evening, drew thither a large and enthusiastic assemblage. Soon after the appointed hour for commencing the proceedings, David Dudley Field, Esq., arose and nominated as chairman of the meeting Mr. William Cullen Bryant. The nomination was received with prolonged applause, and was unanimously approved. Mr. Bryant, after the applause had subsided, said: ‘It is a grateful office that I perform in introducing to you at this time an eminent citizen of the West, whom you know—whom you have known hitherto—only by fame, and who has consented to address a New York assemblage this evening. * * * These children of the West, my friends, form a living bulwark against the advance of slavery, and from them is recruited the vanguard of the armies of liberty. One of them will appear before you this evening in person—a gallant soldier of the political campaign of 1856—who then rendered good service to the Republican cause, and who has been since the great champion of that cause in the struggle which took place two years later for the supremacy of the Republicans in the Legislature of Illinois; who took the field against Senator Douglas, and would have won in the conflict but for the unjust provisions of the law of the State, which allowed a minority of the people to elect a majority of the Legislature. I have only, my friends, to pronounce the name of Abraham Lincoln, of Illinois—I have only to pronounce his name to secure your profound attention.’

“Mr. Lincoln advanced to the desk, and smiling graciously upon his audience, complacently awaited the termination of the cheering and then proceeded with his address as follows: * * * * * When Mr. Lincoln had concluded his address, during the delivery of which he was frequently applauded, three rousing cheers were given for the orator and the sentiments to which he had given utterance.”

Farther notice of Lincoln’s effort is given in an editorial of the same issue of the Times:

“There was a very large meeting of Republicans at Cooper Institute last evening to listen to that noted political exhorter and prairie orator, Abe Lincoln of Illinois. * * * * * The speaker, as soon as he appeared upon the platform, was vehemently cheered, and during the delivery of his address frequently applauded * * * * .”

Greeley, who in his senatorial contest had been opposed to Lincoln, also commented most favorably upon this speech, in the Tribune as follows:

“Since the days of Clay and Webster, no man has spoken to a larger assemblage of the intellect and mental culture of our city.”

Again he says:

“Mr. Lincoln is one of nature’s orators, using his rare powers solely to elucidate and convince, though their inevitable effect is to delight and electrify as well. We present herewith a very full and accurate report of this

¹ Nicolay & Hay, *Abraham Lincoln—A History*, II. 216.

² *The New York Times*, February 23, 1860.

speech, yet the tones, the gestures, the kindling eye, and the mirth-provoking look defy the reporter's skill. The vast assemblage frequently rang with cheers and shouts of applause, which were prolonged and intensified at the close. No man ever before made such an impression on his first appeal to a New York audience."

Greeley also gave even more enthusiastic praise, when writing some years later of the occasion: "I do not hesitate to pronounce it the very best political address to which I ever listened—and I have heard some of Webster's grandest."¹

From New York, Lincoln went to New England, where he lectured in many cities. The Manchester Mirror paid the following high tribute to him: "He did not abuse the South, the Administration or the Democrats. He is far from prepossessing in personal appearance, and his voice is disagreeable, yet he wins your attention and good will from the start. His sense of the ludicrous is very keen, and an exhibition of that is the clincher of all his arguments—not the ludicrous acts of persons, but ludicrous ideas. Hence, he is never offensive and steals away willingly into his train of belief, persons who were opposed to him. For the first half hour his opponents would agree with every word he uttered, and from that point he began to lead them off, little by little, until it seemed as if he had got them all into his fold."²

It was during this Eastern trip that Salmon P. Chase received these words from his lieutenant, Briggs: "Mr. Lincoln of Illinois told me that [he] had a very warm side towards you, for of all the prominent Republicans you were the only one who gave him aid and comfort. I urged him by all means to attend the convention. I was pleased with him, I paid him all the attention I could, went with him to hear Mr. Beecher and Dr. Chapin. Mr. Barney went with him to the "House of Industry" at the Five Points, and then took him home to tea. He was very much pleased with Mr. Barney." That Lincoln, through a fortunate combination of circumstances was himself soon to receive the Republican nomination for the Presidency, was doubtless far from the thoughts of Chase and his lieutenant, as it was from the minds of most men of that time.

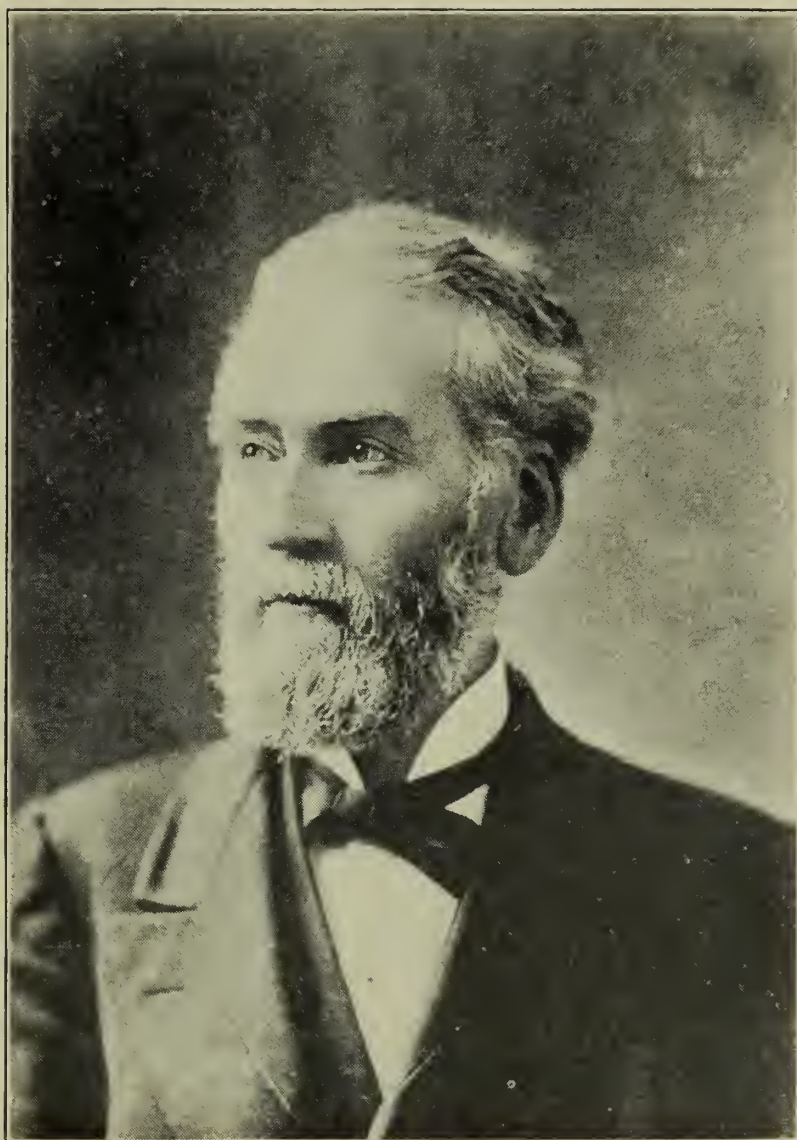
From the following letter written by Joseph Medill to Frederick Bancroft, February 18, 1896,³ we have a revelation of Seward's feeling toward Lincoln at this time: "I believe that Lincoln—a Kentuckian by birth, could carry all of them [the doubtful states] in addition to the states which cast their electoral votes for Fremont, and that would suffice to elect him. Feeling in this way about it, I wrote to the Chicago Tribune, in the latter part of February, 1860, as strong an editorial letter as I was capable of, showing that Lincoln could be elected that year and that Seward could not.

"The article irritated Seward when he read it, and he took occasion to see me immediately thereafter and 'blew me up' tremendously for having disappointed him—'gone back on him'—and preferring that

1. Century Magazine, July, 1891.

2. Chas. Godfrey Leland, *Abraham Lincoln and the Abolition of Slavery in the United States*, p. 80.

3. Bancroft, *William H. Seward*, I, 530.



JOSEPH MEDILL,
Editor of the Chicago Tribune.

‘prairie statesman,’ as he called Lincoln. He gave me to understand that he was the chief teacher of the principles of the Republican party before Lincoln was known other than as a country lawyer of Illinois.”

The New York Times supported Mr. Seward, and yet realized what the difficulties of the situation might demand, as is shown by the following significant editorial items appearing at intervals up through the time of the convention:

“March 16, 1860—Mr. Seward is the natural candidate of the Republican party, and if that party feels strong enough in convention to elect him, he will, beyond all question, be its nominee. April 21, 1860—If Mr. Douglas should be the Democratic nominee it would not be so safe for the Republicans to trust to their unaided strength, and Mr. Seward would doubtless be set aside for some more available man. May 15, 1860—Illinois alone works hard for Lincoln. May 19, 1860—The work of the convention is ended. The youngster, who, with ragged trousers, used barefoot to drive his father’s oxen and spend his days in splitting rails, has risen to high eminence, and Abram Lincoln, of Illinois, is declared its candidate for President by the National Republican party. Great inquiry has been made this afternoon into the history of Mr. Lincoln. The only evidence that he has a history as yet discovered, is that he had a stump canvass with Mr. Douglas, in which he was *beaten*. He is not very strong at the West, but is unassailable in his private character.”

From several sources may be gathered the effect which the news of the nomination produced in the East. The report in the New York Times is as follows:

“Washington. Friday, May 18.

“The reception of the news of Lincoln’s nomination at Chicago threw the House of Representatives into such excitement as to suspend business for some minutes. Everybody was delighted. Even Mr. Seward’s warmest admirers pronounced the nomination most able and judicious. Judge Douglas and his friends think it the heaviest blow the Democracy has yet received, and say that by tomorrow night there will not be a tar barrel or a pound of powder in Illinois.”¹

Another account of the receipt of the news in Congress is given by Mr. Adams.² “The report was received with general incredulity, until by repeated announcements from different quarters it appeared that he had carried the day by a union of all the anti-Seward elements. The effect upon me was to depress, for, though no partisan of Governor Seward, I did feel as if he was the man to whom the party owed the nomination. But I could not fail to perceive in the faces of many of our friends the signs of a very opposite conviction. In truth, the western section and the middle states are exceedingly timid, and desire as far as possible to escape so direct an issue on the slave question as the nomination of Mr. Seward would have made. Mr. Lincoln is by no means of so decided a type, and yet he is in many respects a fair representative. I believe him honest and tolerably capable, but he has no experience and no business habits.”

1. *New York Times*, May 19, 1860.

2. Adams, *Charles Francis Adams*, 114.

This opinion of Mr. Adams is similar to that given by Charles Carlton Coffin: "There was but one name on the lips of the Republicans of Illinois—that of Abraham Lincoln. * * * Outside of Illinois he was the 'rail-splitter'—a plain, ungainly man, a homespun candidate, once member of Congress, but unacquainted with public affairs as the ruler of a nation."

The New York "Times," May 19, 1860, published a most interesting list of extracts from various other eastern newspapers, showing the general attitude toward Lincoln's nomination. The comment of the New York "Tribune" is extremely fair and favorable to Lincoln: "While Mr. Lincoln's position as a Republican renders him satisfactory to the most zealous member of the party, the moderation of his character, and the conservative tendencies of his mind, long approved and well known of all men in public life, commend him to every section of the opposition. There is no good reason why Americans and Whigs, and in short all who are inspired rather by patriotism than by party feeling, should not rally to his support. Republicans and conservatives, those who dread the extension of slavery, and those who dread the progress of administrative and legislative corruption, may be assured that in him both these evils will find a stern and immovable antagonist and an impassable barrier. At the same time, as a man of the people, raised by his own genius and integrity from the humblest to the highest position, having made for himself an honored name as a lawyer, an advocate, a popular orator, a statesman, and a man, the industrious and intelligent masses of the country may well hail his nomination with a swelling tide of enthusiasm of which the wild and prolonged outbursts at Chicago yesterday are the fitting prelude and beginning."

The Buffalo "Commercial Advertiser" is somewhat more conservative, although favorable also in its comment: "Mr. Lincoln has not that long experience in public service which we could have wished, but he has something better in the strong, sagacious mind, cool and unshaking nerve, and intelligent familiarity with public measures, which lie at the bottom of all true statesmen."

The New Haven "Palladium" presents an extremely eulogistic notice as follows: "'Honest Abe Lincoln,' as everybody calls him where he is best known, is just the man that this sorely swindled and disgraced nation needs for President. He is a man of stainless purity, his whole life is as spotless as the driven snow. He is no corruptionist, no trickster, no time server, but an honest, brave, straightforward, able man, who will restore the government to the purity of practice and principle which characterize the administration of the Revolutionary patriots. For this reason chiefly the heart of the nation, as if impelled by an overruling power, has been drawing silently but irresistibly towards him." The Concord "Statesman" expresses very neatly the reason for Seward's rejection: "* * * it is not that they loved Cæsar less, but Rome more."

The "National Intelligencer" expresses one of the strongest notes of dissatisfaction: "Though fully identified with the principles of that party, and justly entitled by his private worth and proved ability

to wear with dignity and honor * * * it may be able to confer, Mr. Lincoln, so far as we are aware, has not until recently occupied a prominent place in the list of distinguished citizens from which it was supposed the Republicans would make a selection in nominating a candidate for the Presidency."

There are many other quotations from Republican papers which cannot be given here, but the principal thought of them all seems to be that, Lincoln, while he might be an available candidate, was also a worthy one, to whose support wisdom, patriotism and loyalty called all the party factions. Seward himself set a noble example, when, even in the first bitterness of disappointment, he wrote the following words for the "Daily Republican:" "No truer or firmer defender of the Republican faith could have been found * * * than the distinguished * * * citizen on whom the honors of the nomination have fallen."¹

With the opinions of these Republican papers it is interesting to compare the triumphant note of the Democratic Albany "Atlas and Argus:" "The defeat of Seward and the nomination of Lincoln emasculate the Republican party."

The most bitter attacks at the North were from the Abolitionists, headed by Wendell Phillips, whose organ was the "Liberator." The biography of William Lloyd Garrison throws some interesting light upon the subject: "The triumph of the Republican party was now a foregone conclusion, and all eyes were turned in scrutiny upon Lincoln. To the country at large he was an obscure, not to say an unknown man. His visit to New England in the fall of 1848, when, during the Congressional recess, he took the stump for Zachary Taylor, had made no impression. 'Who is this huckster in politics?' asked Wendell Phillips at the New England convention on May 30. 'Who is this county court advocate? Who is this who does not know whether he has got any opinions [about slavery]?' "²

It fell to Mr. Phillips, unhappily, to give the cue to the Abolitionists concerning Mr. Lincoln. Such examinations as he bestowed on the Illinois lawyer's brief Congressional career caused him to misinterpret and unjustly characterize a measure of Lincoln's intended to affect abolition in the District of Columbia, but accompanied by what seemed a necessary provision for the surrender of fugitive slaves—else had the District become a refuge for them from the adjoining states of Maryland and Virginia, and from the whole seaboard. Singling out this provision, Mr. Phillips published in the "Liberator" of June 22, 1860, a stinging article, headed "Abraham Lincoln, the Slave-Hound of Illinois." Mr. Garrison very reluctantly admitted both the caption and the text (of the justice of which he had no means of forming an opinion) and only in consideration of the article being signed. Mr. Lincoln did not lack defenders, and in the end Mr. Phillips produced a transcript of the bill.

Lincoln's debates with Douglas in 1858 were next overhauled by the Abolitionists, with a not unfair emphasizing of expressions which

¹ Lothrop, *William H. Seward*, 201.

² William Lloyd Garrison, *The Story of His Life—Told by His Children*, III, 303.

showed how far the Whig Republican then was from acknowledging the brotherhood of man, or from objecting to the Dred Scott decision because of its disfranchising the free blacks. His anticipation of Seward's "irrepressible conflict" was quickly pointed out in mitigation—proof of his statesmanship if not of his humanity.

The principal features of Mr. Phillips' "Slave-Hound" article are as follows: "Abraham Lincoln, the Slave-Hound of Illinois. We gibbet a Northern hound today, side by side with the infamous Mason of Virginia."¹ After quoting Section 5 of Lincoln's bill providing for the return of fugitive slaves from the District of Columbia, Mr. Phillips goes on to say: "No wonder Mr. Lincoln is unwilling to make any opposition to the Fugitive Slave Bill! No wonder the Chicago convention omitted that point in their resolutions! Their standard-bearer has a worse bill to answer for than even Mr. Mason."

In his lectures, Mr. Phillips expressed himself with equal bitterness as in the following remarks delivered November 7, 1860, at Boston.² "It is a noble idea—equality before the law. * * * Mark it and let us question Mr. Lincoln about it. Do you believe, Mr. Abraham Lincoln, that the negro is your political and social equal, or ought to be? Not a bit of it. Do you believe he should sit on juries? Never. Do you think he should vote? Certainly not. Should he be considered a citizen? I tell you frankly, no. Do you think that, when the Declaration of Independence says, 'all men are created equal,' it intends the political equality of blacks and whites? No sir.

"If this 'idea that fills all generous minds' be equality, surely Mr. Lincoln's mind is as yet empty. * * * and, secondly, notwithstanding the emptiness of Mr. Lincoln's mind, I think we shall yet succeed in making this a decent land to live in. May I tell you why? Place yourselves at the door of the Chicago convention. Do you see Mr. Lincoln? He believes a negro may walk where he wishes, eat what he earns, read what he can, and associate with any other who is exactly of the same shade of black he is. That is all he can grant."

The *Liberator*, later feeling called upon to explain even its half-hearted support of Lincoln, made the following elaborate justification of its position:³

"From the administration of Mr. Lincoln, as distinguished from his election, we are warranted in entertaining no confident hopes. His election as the act of the people, so intended, will be a demonstration in favor of liberty; his administration, as the action of an individual so constrained by the oath of office and surrounding circumstances, must be a continual support of slavery. Let not, therefore, any satisfaction here expressed be understood as based on expectations of what will be done by the incoming National Administration."

In opposition to the Abolitionist attitude, most of the prominent Eastern men of letters gave Lincoln their hearty support, as is shown by the passage quoted by Rhodes and by personal testimony:⁴

"* * * The torch-bearers of literature were on the side of Lincoln. 'I vote with the Republican party,' wrote Holmes to Motley. 'I can-

1. *The Liberator*, June 22, 1860.

2. *Speeches, Lectures and Letters*, 302.

3. *The Liberator*, November 9, 1860.

4. *History of the United States*, II, 455.

not hesitate between them and the Democrats.' Whittier offered the resolutions at a Republican meeting at Amesbury; William Cullen Bryant was at the head of the Lincoln electoral ticket of New York, and George William Curtis spoke frequently from the stump."

¹Lowell in his "Prose Works" also, spoke his conviction as follows: "We are persuaded that the election of Mr. Lincoln will do more than anything else to appease the excitement of the country. He has proved both his ability and his integrity; he has had experience enough in public affairs to make him a statesman, and not enough to make him a politician. That he has not had more will be no objection to him in the eyes of those who have seen the administration of the experienced public functionary whose term of office is just drawing to a close."

Although, in the course of his public life Lincoln was often ignored, and misunderstood, and though his true worth was probably apparent to but few before his death, yet his brilliant and noble qualities steadily won their way to recognition in the East as well as in the West, as is shown by the following just and appreciative editorial in the New York Times:² "There can be no sort of difficulty in ascertaining Mr. Lincoln's opinions concerning slavery and its relations to our Federal Government—or in inferring from them what the general tone and character of his administration will be. Though he has taken small part in public life hitherto, he has had occasion very frequently to declare his sentiments on this subject, and that too, in a form at once definite and calculated to inspire confidence in his entire sincerity. Indeed, it is impossible for any one to listen to Mr. Lincoln, or to read what he has said or written, without the firmest faith in his sincerity and candor. His speeches carry with them the most conclusive evidence of his honesty and good faith. During all that long debate with Judge Douglas he never, in a single instance stoops to mis-construction, or to undignified retort, or swerves one hair's breadth from the most un-impeachable fairness and courtesy. He expresses the sophistries of his opponent with great acuteness and force, and bears down upon his positions with resistless logic. But he never deals in invective, he never dodges or evades any point made against him, and the whole tone and temper of his speeches is rather that of a judge, solicitous only for the truth, than of a partisan seeking a political victory. We know no public man of the day who evinces the great qualities of fair-mindedness, of mental as well as moral integrity, and of a sincere and profound conviction of the justice of his opinions, in a higher degree than Mr. Lincoln."

In brief, then, the facts and opinions here quoted concerning "The Growth of Public Opinion in the East in Regard to Lincoln," show on the one hand a man, slowly and conscientiously pursuing the course which to him seemed right to follow; and on the other hand, ignorance, indifference, doubt, misunderstanding and malice gradually yielding their tardy recognition to a greatness which, seeking not its own, could not long be hidden or denied.

¹ Lowell, Prose Works, V, 43.

² New York Times, November 8, 1860.

